

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1163

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E.O.11652: NA
TAGS: PEPR
SUBJECT: JEWISH CEMETERIES IN HUNGARY

REF: (A) BUDAPEST 1372 (B) STATE 82676

SUMMARY: THERE IS NO PROBLEM OF GOVERNMENT EXPROPRIATION OF JEWISH CEMETERIES IN HUNGARY. END SUMMARY.

1. DCM MET APR 7 WITH IMRE HEBER, PRESIDENT OF THE CENTRAL BOARD OF HUNGARIAN JEWS, AND TWO OTHER JEWISH OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS THE ALLEGED EXPROPRIATION OF JEWISH CEMETERIES IN HUNGARY, SPECIFICALLY, THE CEMETERY IN ASZOD.

2. HEBER EXPLAINED THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO RPT NO EXPROPRIATION OF JEWISH CEMETERIES IN HUNGARY BY THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT. HE EXPLAINED THAT THERE ARE ALMOST 1,000 JEWISH CEMETERIES IN HUNGARY, THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HAS MORE THAN ENOUGH BURIAL SITES, AND IS UNDER NO PRESSURE FROM THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT TO GIVE UP ANY CEMETERIES. HE SPECIFICALLY ASSERTED THAT THERE IS NO EXPROPRIATION CAMPAIGN AGAINST JEWISH HOLDINGS OF ANY KIND AND EXPRESSED COMPLETE SATISFACTION WITH THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT'S TREATMENT OF HUNGARIAN JEWS.

3. HEBER ALSO EXPLAINED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN ISOLATED
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CASES -- HE ESTIMATED THREE OVER THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS -- IN WHICH A LOCAL TOWN COUNCIL HAS WANTED TO USE SOME LAND WHICH IS OWNED BY THE JEWISH COMMUNITY AND MAY BE USED AS A CEMETERY. IN EACH OF THESE CASES THE TOWN COUNCIL HAS NEGOTIATED WITH THE LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITY AND HAS REACHED A SOLUTION WHICH IS MUTUALLY SATISFACTORY. IN HIS OPINION, THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT ITSELF

IS NOT EVEN AWARE OF THESE CASES SINCE THEY HAVE BEEN
ALWAYS SATISFACTORILY SETTLED ON THE LOCAL LEVEL.

4. IN THE CASE OF ASZOD, HEBER EXPLAINED THAT THE JEWISH CEMETERY ADJOINS THE TOWN COUNCIL BUILDING. AS THE TOWN HAS DEVELOPED, THE JEWISH PROPERTY HAS BECOME DESIRABLE REAL ESTATE. EIGHT MONTHS AGO THE TOWN COUNCIL APPROACHED THE LOCAL JEWISH COMMUNITY WITH THE REQUEST TO BUY A SMALL PIECE OF LAND WHICH DIRECTLY JOINED THE TOWN HALL. THE AREA INVOLVED IS 1,400 SQ. METERS, OUT OF THE TOTAL AREA OF THE CEMETERY OF 5,600 SQ. METERS.

5. THE TOWN COUNCIL OFFERED TO PURCHASE THE LAND AND REINTER AT ITS OWN EXPENSE THE REMAINS IN THE 100 GRAVES WHICH WOULD BE AFFECTED. ACCORDING TO HEBER THERE IS SUFFICIENT AREA LEFT IN THE CEMETERY TO RELOCATE ALL 100 GRAVES. THE ONLY COST INVOLVED TO THE FAMILIES WOULD BE TRANSPORTATION OF THE REMAINS TO ISRAEL OR BUDAPEST IF THE FAMILY SO WISHED.

6. HEBER EXPLAINED THAT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HAS BEEN ASSURED THAT THE EXHUMATION AND REINTERMENT WOULD BE CARRIED OUT IN STRICT ACCORDANCE WITH JEWISH TRADITION AND LAW. HE ADDED THAT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IS COMPLETELY SATISFIED WITH THE ARRANGEMENTS IT HAS MADE WITH THE TOWN COUNCIL. HE VOLUNTEERED THAT THERE IS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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NO QUESTION OF ANTISEMITISM OR PERSECUTION INVOLVED IN THE TOWN COUNCIL'S REQUEST FOR THE LAND. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE COMMUNITY'S NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE TOWN COUNCIL WERE CARRIED OUT IN COMPLETE HARMONY AND THAT THERE IS NO DISSENSION WITHIN THE HUNGARIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY ABOUT THE PLAN TO SELL THE LAND AND EXHUME AND RELOCATE THE 100 GRAVES AFFECTED.

7. NO GRAVES HAVE BEEN RELOCATED YET. THE HUNGARIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY HAS PUBLICIZED THE RELOCATION OF THE 100 GRAVES BOTH IN HUNGARY AND THROUGH INTERNATIONAL JEWISH PUBLICATIONS. OF THE 100 GRAVES, 15 FAMILIES HAVE EXPRESSED WISHES CONCERNING THE REINTERMENT OF THE REMAINS. HEBER EXPECTS THE EXHUMATION TO TAKE PLACE IN MAY OR JUNE. THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WILL RECEIVE ONE MONTH'S PRE-NOTIFICATION AND WILL CARRY OUT THE REINTERMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH JEWISH LAW AND TRADITION.

8. HEBER SAID THAT THE EMBASSY AND THE DEPARTMENT WERE FREE TO USE HIS NAME AND THE ABOVE INFORMATION IN REPLYING TO RABBI BARRY DOV LERNER AND ANY OTHER INQUIRER.

9. COMMENT: HEBER'S EXPLANATION WAS QUITE CONVINCING. THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO THE EMBASSY TO BE ANY BASIS TO RABBI LERNER'S ALLEGATION THAT THE REINTERMENT OF JEWISH REMAINS AT ASZOD IS A HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE OR IN ANY WAY REPRESENTS AN ANTISEMITIC MOVE ON THE PART OF THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT. IF ANY FURTHER INFORMATION IS NEEDED, HEBER AND THE OTHER OFFICIALS OF THE HUNGARIAN COMMUNITY ARE MORE THAN WILLING TO RESPOND TO EMBASSY INQUIRIES.

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